

TO: Members of the Senate Education Committee
FROM: Tonia Bloom, Trustee, Corvallis School District
RE: Support for SB 69 and SB 70
DATE: February, 4, 2009

As anyone involved in education knows, it is always good to review the basics. In this case the basics are the core definition and purposes of public education funding, as defined by the Legislature in 20-9-309. Central to that definition is the recognition that all students are not identical in their needs and that resources are necessary for special education and at-risk students, as well as for those of exceptionally high ability. Education, of course, would be simple if all students were the same physically and intellectually, if all arrived at school with the same preparation, and if all enjoyed the same family, social and economic support outside of school. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

Who are at-risk students and why should the Legislature be concerned about them? At-risk students are children who arrive at school for the first day of kindergarten or on any given day throughout their years in public school less ready to learn than their peers. It may be that they have been talked to, played with, or read to by the adults in their lives less than other children....or not at all. They may have emotional or physical health issues. They may be hungry or poorly nourished. Their home lives may be in turmoil because of economic hardship or domestic upheaval. They may be physically abused. The adults in their lives may not provide good examples of success and may not communicate the importance of school to them. It is unlikely that anyone helps them with their homework or pays much attention to their schoolwork.

As legislators, what you need to know is that these students can learn and succeed in school, but it takes extra effort and resources. You need to know that the cost of not providing the needed resources is huge, not only to the children themselves, but to society as a whole. It is measured in higher drop-out rates, higher welfare roles, higher prison populations, and lower productivity for the economy as a whole. And, you need to know that in times of economic stress such as this, the number of at-risk students is larger and the challenges they face outside of school are even greater than usual. There is evidence of this every day in our schools.

The Legislature faces a difficult task in determining priorities in tight budget times, as do those who make decisions for schools at the local level. The most costly choice we could make is to fail to support the learning of the students in our schools who are most at-risk for failure. This is our state's seed corn and failing to nurture it properly will impact us all in the long-term.

Thank you for the opportunity to hear my concerns. I respectfully urge your support for both these important bills.